

ABROAD

PEKING

The Lamps of China

China's quest for oil resources in offshore fields has so far proved seriously disappointing to authorities here who were banking on such discoveries to provide domestic energy for future industrial development. The Chinese National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) as a result has offered an additional 36,000 square miles of its coastal waters to foreign prospectors, and has reduced its terms for foreign exploitation of any oil found. So far, terms have been steep: The companies were obliged to pay all exploration costs and at least 49 per cent of development costs after oil had been found. The CNOOC is shortly to open an office in London to further its interests and contacts in Europe. It already has offices in Houston and Hong Kong. Two years of drilling in the South China Sea have produced almost no commercially viable results, even though forty companies were involved. The new offerings include drillings in the Pearl River Basin off Canton, long regarded as among the most favorable sites, and the prices for rights have come down. The Chinese had originally hoped for the discovery of a vast oil-bearing field off their shores comparable to fields in the Middle East. There are indeed oil-bearing rock formations to be found in Chinese waters, but there is definitely no very large field to discover. What oil is found there will be deeper down and consequently more expensive to exploit.

ROME

Islam in the Eternal City

The cornerstone of the biggest mosque in Europe has finally been laid in a wooded tract on Monte Antenne on the outskirts of Rome. Designed to serve Italy's 150,000 Moslems, forty thousand of whom live in the capital, the mosque will include an Islamic cultural center, a library, and a student dormitory. It will be surmounted by a large dome surrounded by 16 smaller ones; its minaret has been scaled down to a mere 75 feet in height out of deference to St. Peter's and other monuments. The mosque has been a source of controversy—and not just over the height of its minaret—since it was first projected in 1978. It took the Roman Municipal Building Council 17 hours of fierce debate to approve the original plans. Then environmental groups objected on the grounds that it would spoil an undeveloped tract of land hitherto used as a park. The architects, both European and Islamic, battled so extensively among themselves that the situation at times threatened seriously to disturb Italy's diplomatic relations with the Arab countries.

RAVENNA

Sick Sea

The Adriatic Sea, one of history's most renowned bodies of water, is in danger of "dying" from pollution, according to environmental groups, largely because of conflicts and cross-purposes within the Italian bureaucracy. On the one hand, there are continuing attempts, launched and relaunched, to limit the discharges of sulphur and other noxious chemicals from giant utility plants in the lower Po valley; one environmental authority estimates that the dis-

charges are equivalent to throwing seven thousand automobiles a day into the sea, which, being almost tideless, is particularly vulnerable. But then it turns out that some of the utilities have multinational subsidiaries that have been commissioned by the Italian Foreign Ministry to manufacture fertilizers for the Third World, fertilizers whose processing also causes pollution. So there are policy decisions that go beyond the limits of environmental concern. Yet another group involved is the hotel owners and innkeepers of the Romagna coast of northern Italy, who are afraid their 2.5-billion-lire annual vacation business will literally go up in the smoke of the polluted Adriatic waterfront.

ISLAMABAD

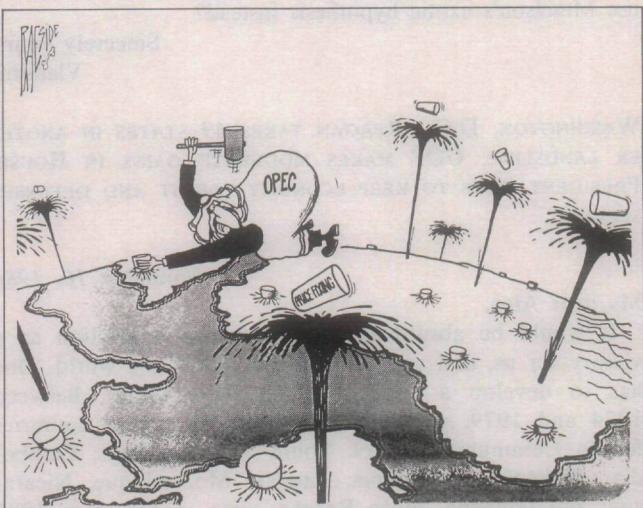
Big Losses

One of the Soviets' biggest losses in their five-year war of subjugation against Afghanistan was the destruction by guerrillas of ten Soviet helicopters at one swoop at the main Soviet base of Bagram north of Kabul. The attack occurred at the height of a snowstorm when all aircraft were grounded, according to refugee sources. Some fifty guerrillas participated in the attack, which also destroyed six tanks and three ammunition storage installations.

LONDON

What the Drill Is

A vexing problem has been created for the performance of the time-honored rifle drill by the scarlet-coated, bearskin-helmeted guardsmen who pace majestically before Britain's royal palaces. The new British army rifle is simply too short to permit soldiers to comply with traditional regulations on how to hold their weapons. The new rifle—the 5.56-mm SA-80—weighs one pound more than the weapon on which the old drill manual was based, but is 14 inches shorter. That means that if the rifle butt is on the ground, the average soldier is too tall for the muzzle to reach his fingertips, thus rendering impossible a couple of important drill positions, including Order Arms. For this command, the guardsman will instead hold the rifle across the lower body at arm's length. In the Shoulder Arms position, the rifle is held by the butt under the right elbow, instead of being cradled in the palm of the right hand. There is no significant change in the Present Arms maneuver, but the order to Fix Bayonets will come when the rifle is at Shoulder Arms, rather than when its butt is on the ground as before.



Raiside, Victoria Times-Colonist / Rothco

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